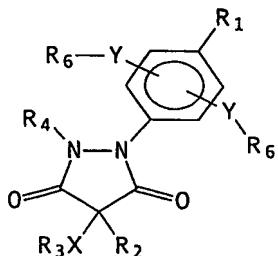


Claims:

1) An optionally substituted compound of the formula I or a salt thereof;

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(I)

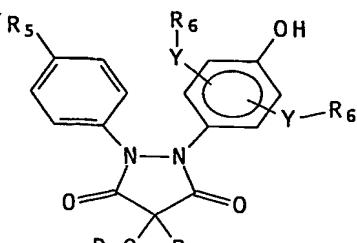
wherein R₁ is O or S, R₂ is hydrogen or more preferably an C₁-C₁₀ organic group attached by a carbon atom, X is H, O, OO, S or SS R₃ is absent where X=H, is hydrogen or is a hydroxyl or thiol protecting group, R₄ is a hetero- or preferably homo-cyclic aryl group, optionally substituted with a further group R₅ one Y group is S and the other is either H (in which case only one R₆ group is present) or S; and R₆ is, independently, an organic group of molecular weight up to around 500 amu.

2) A compound as claimed in claim 1 wherein R₂ is an optionally substituted alkyl, alkenyl, alkynyl, alkaryl, 25 aralkyl, arylsulphonylalkyl or aralkenyl group, R₃ is hydrogen or a C₂-C₇, acyl, or alkaryl group, R₅ is an alkyl, alkenyl, alkynyl, OH, O-alkyl, thio, thioalkyl, halo, or primary, secondary, tertiary or quaternary amino group and R₆ is a substituted or unsubstituted alkyl, alkenyl, alkynyl, alkaryl, aralkyl, alkyl ester, alkyl amide, alkyl acid, polyol, sugar, oligo(alkylamide), oligo(alkylester), or oligopeptide group.

35 3) A compound as claimed in claim 1 or claim 2 of formula III;

- 26 -

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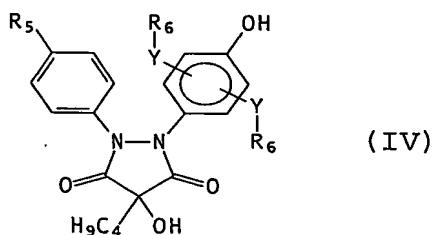


(III)

10 wherein Y, R₂ and R₃ are as described in claim 1 or claim 2 and R₅ is hydrogen or an alkyl, alkenyl group, OH, O-alkyl, O-acyl, SH, S-alkyl, S-acyl, halo, or amino group.

15 4) A compound as claimed in any of claims 1 to 3 of formula IV, or a salt thereof;

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(IV)

25 wherein R₅ is hydrogen or OH and each R₆ is, independently, a cysteine or a glutathione moiety attached via the sulphur atom thereof.

30 5) A compound as claimed in any of claims 1 to 4 wherein both Y-R₆ groups are S-R₆.

6) A compound of any of claims 1 to 5 wherein the two Y groups are ortho to group R₁.

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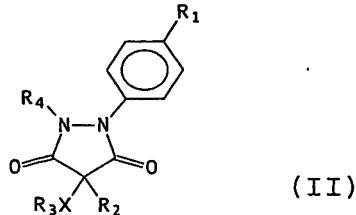
7) A compound of any of claims 1 to 5 wherein one Y group is ortho to group R₁ and one Y group is meta to

group R₁.

8) A compound formed by reaction of a thiol (R₆-SH) with a starting material of formula II

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Wherein R₁, R₂, R₃, R₄, R₆ and X are as defined in any of

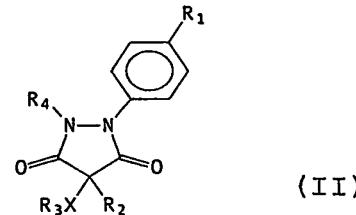
claims 1 to 4, or protected derivatives or precursors

15 thereof.

9) A method for the synthesis of a compound of any of claims 1 to 7, said method comprising reaction of a thiol (R₆-SH) with a starting material of formula II

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Wherein R₁, R₂, R₃, R₄, R₆ and X are as defined in any of

claims 1 to 4, or protected derivatives or precursors

30 thereof.

10) A method of treatment of a mammalian subject comprising administering a compound as claimed in any of claims 1 to 8.

35

11) A method for the treatment, prevention or control of a viral, autoimmune, neoplastic, inflammatory

- 28 -

and/or allergic condition, said method comprising administration of a compound as claimed in any of claims 1 to 8.

5 12) A method of tonic treatment of an aging mammalian subject, or a subject suffering from the aftereffects of infection, disease or treatment, said method comprising administration of a compound as claimed in any of claims 1 to 8.

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13) A compound as claimed in any of claims 1 to 8 for use in therapy.

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14) The use of a compound as claimed in any of claims 1 to 8 in the manufacture of a medicament for use in a method as claimed in any of claims 10 to 12.

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15) A pharmaceutical composition comprising a compound as claimed in any of claims 1 to 8 and at least one pharmaceutically acceptable excipient, carrier or diluent.

25

16) A functional or fortified food comprising a compound as claimed in any of claims 1 to 8 formulated in an edible food or potable beverage product.